

3/07/2005 This Week in Congress

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March 7, 2005

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." I hope you find it useful.

USDA Secretary Mike Johanns Discusses Beef and Canada

Livestock issues took center stage in Washington, D.C. this week. On Tuesday, the House Agriculture Committee held hearings with U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns over the Canadian border issue.

During the hearing, I was able to question Agriculture Secretary Johanns about the decision to reopen the U.S. border to Canadian beef imports. Secretary Johanns also discussed the potential ramifications of that decision on other areas of our agriculture trade policy. I look forward to working with Secretary Johanns to tackle the major issues facing agriculture as we move forward over the coming months.

The Senate also took up the Canadian border issue this week and narrowly passed a resolution of disapproval to keep the border closed to Canadian beef imports. This legislation will now come to the House, after which, if it passes, it will go to the President for his signature. However, President Bush has already said that he will veto the legislation if it makes it to him, and its fate in the House is still unclear. The Administration believes that keeping the border closed with Canada hurts our position when negotiating on other trade issues like opening the Japanese beef markets.

Japanese Sanctions Sought

On Thursday, I held a press conference in Washington, D.C. to introduce a resolution calling on Japan to reopen its markets to U.S. beef. The press conference was attended by a number of Japanese journalists and has resulted in the Japanese Embassy's request for a meeting to discuss this situation.

We have waited long enough for our borders to be reopened with Japan. This resolution calls on Japan to reopen its border to U.S. beef or face immediate retaliatory economic sanctions. Its time for the Japanese government to understand that there are consequences if they continue to deny access to U.S. beef.

In December of 2003, the U.S. discovered a single case of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE), in a Canadian dairy cow. Since that time, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has aggressively implemented additional safety checks in the beef system to guarantee the safety of American beef. The result is that U.S. standards now exceed international beef safety standards.

Japan cannot have it both ways. They cannot benefit from exports to the U.S. while denying our imports. With no valid scientific evidence to support Japan's decision to keep the border closed, the delays must come to an end. The U.S. has done its part to meet an agreement that was reached on October 23, 2004 with Japan but Japan has not, and they stand to lose much more than the United States.

The American beef supply is among the safest in the world. However, losing access to a valuable trading market like Japan has cost the U.S. cattle industry an estimated \$2 billion. I intend to work with my colleagues in Congress to ensure that Japan understands the seriousness of their actions and the consequences of their continued inaction.

Beef issues are important to the First Congressional District. In 2003, the 'Big First' produced nearly five billion pounds of beef, making it the largest beef producing congressional district in the nation. I will continue working on this important issue to our state and nation.

WTO Reaches Decision on Brazilian Cotton Case

On Thursday, the World Trade Organization (WTO) dealt a major blow to U.S. trade efforts by siding with Brazil on their challenge of U.S. cotton subsidies. The WTO denied all 19 of the U.S. claims, agreeing with Brazil's claims that the U.S. has been giving too high of subsidies.

The effect of this ruling is likely to be felt across the agriculture spectrum in other areas such as soybeans, rice and dairy. It is also likely that this issue will come before the House Agriculture Subcommittee on General Farm Commodities and Risk Management, which I chair, as we look at ways to broker a deal that protects American farmers and ranchers but is acceptable to all sides. As more information is known, I will keep you updated on this story and what actions are being taken in Washington, D.C. to address it.

Transportation Committee Passes Highway Bill

On Wednesday, the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee unanimously approved H.R. 3, the Transportation Equity Act, to reauthorize federal highway, transit and public safety programs through the year 2009. This legislation will invest over \$2 billion in Kansas' transportation infrastructure, which is important to our state's economy and our ability to move both people and products. The House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee estimates that, for every \$1 billion invested in federal highway and transit, 47,500 jobs are created or sustained. The legislation now goes to the House of Representatives for consideration and is expected to be on the House floor for a vote next week.

As this legislation is considered, I will continue to work to strengthen and maintain Kansas' highways, roads, bridges and transit services.

Welcoming Reverend James Akers to the U.S. House

On Wednesday, I welcomed National American Legion Chaplain, Reverend James T. Akers from Madison to the House of Representatives. I had the pleasure of introducing him when he gave the morning prayer to the U.S. House of Representatives before we began our daily business. Reverend Akers is the Minister-at-large for the Anglican Orthodox Church in Kansas, and it was an honor to have him in Washington, D.C. I appreciated his taking time to travel to our nation's capital to participate in this important daily event.

Attending the Kansas Prayer Breakfast in Topeka

Early Friday morning, I joined 1,000 Kansans at the 44th annual Kansas Prayer Breakfast in Topeka, sponsored by Topeka Fellowship. Also attending were Senator Brownback, Congressman Jim Ryun, Kansas State Treasurer Lynn Jenkins, Kansas Attorney General Phil Kline, Kansas Speaker of the House Doug Mays, and Kansas Adjunct General Todd Bunting and Governor Kathleen Sebelius. The breakfast featured Mark Victor Hansen, author of the "Chicken Soup for the Soul" series. This event provided a chance to join with leaders to worship and ask for divine guidance as we work on behalf of Kansans.

Announcing A Federal Grant to Fight Meth in Kansas

Also on Friday, I attended a press conference hosted by the Kansas Methamphetamine Prevention Project (KMPP) and the Kansas Bureau of Investigation (KBI). Senator Sam Brownback and I announced a \$300,000 federal grant that will allow our state and local law enforcement officials to continue efforts combating the meth problem across our state. Meth has unfortunately become a growing problem in many communities throughout Kansas.

The good news is that we have dedicated people on the front lines, such as Rice County Sheriff Steve Bundy. Sheriff Bundy shared success stories that are happening in Rice County regarding meth prevention. I am confident that KBI Director Larry Welch and Cristi Cain, KMPP State Coordinator, will utilize these additional funds to make sure that our communities are safe and drug-free.

Testifying With Senator Brownback Before Kansas House and Senate Committees

Following the grant announcement, Senator Brownback and I provided congressional updates before the Kansas House Economic Development Committee and the Kansas Senate Commerce Committee. I spoke about the transportation bill, the energy bill, the rising costs of health care and the future of our agricultural economy. These issues are important to sustaining our way of life in Kansas. I emphasized the importance of working together at all levels of government to guarantee that these issues are properly addressed.

Discussing BRAC with Lt. Governor Moore

Later on Friday, I met briefly with Kansas Lieutenant Governor John Moore to discuss the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process for military installations. Lt. Governor Moore serves as Chairman of the Kansas BRAC Commission. The meeting gave me a chance to reiterate the challenges that face our military communities, including Fort Riley and Junction City, and the importance of keeping Fort Riley and the rest of our military institutions in place.

Meeting With Kansas Millers

On Monday, I met with John Gillcrist, president of Bartlett Processing and Phil Strongin, Vice-Chairman of Cereal Food Processors, with the Kansas Millers Association in Lawrence. We discussed the need to increase food aid to countries that are in need of the additional assistance. I have been a supporter of increasing food aid and will continue working to increase aid to affected areas.

President Reagan's Campaign Team Comes to Kansas

Also in Lawrence, I joined Kansans for the 2005 Presidential Lecture Series at the Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics at the University of Kansas. The Dole Center is an incredible addition to KU's campus and is a great resource for our state. The lecture brought Frank Donatelli, Ed Rollins, Craig Shirley and Richard Wirthlin to the center to discuss "Electing Reagan: The Presidential Campaigns." The distinguished panel of speakers-who are experts in the fields of political strategy, government and communications-were able to share their unique experiences and observations with the attendees.

Celebrating the Success of GlobalFlyer

On Thursday, the Salina community played host to and joined the world in celebrating the record-breaking around-the-world flight of Virgin Atlantic's GlobalFlyer. Pilot Steve Fossett flew around the world in 67 hours and two minutes, becoming the first pilot to fly around the world solo non-stop. He chose the Salina Municipal Airport for his trip's starting and ending point.

This was an exciting time for the Salina community, and I am honored that Virgin Atlantic and Mr. Fossett chose Salina to be a part of this historic flight. I am also proud of the people of Salina, and the surrounding area, for their enthusiastic support of this endeavor. I was able to see this enthusiasm first-hand during an earlier event celebrating the launch of

GlobalFlyer. Our state has a rich aviation history, and I am glad to see Salina play a role in this chapter of that history.

In the Office

My Washington, D.C. office was busy this week with a number of Kansans visiting to discuss a wide range of issues. Among those visiting were Mike Life and Todd Godfrey of Junction City, representing the Kansas Narcotics Association, to discuss homeland security issues and ongoing drug war. K-State Agriculture Dean Fred Cholick and Director Steven Graham of Manhattan, Assistant to the Director Connie Pelton Kays from Pittsburg and Steve Irsik from Ingalls were in on behalf of the Council for Agricultural Research, Extension and Teaching Representatives to talk about federal funding for research, extension and training through USDA. Steve Ezell of Pratt, Monte Clarke and Matthew Clarke of Great Bend were in the office to discuss water well drilling issues. Rick Budden of Junction City, representing the Association of Civilian Technicians for the Army National Guard was in to talk about retirement benefits and overtime pay issues.

In representing the Kansas American Legion were David Warnken of Hutchinson, Elgin Wahlborg of Arkansas City and James Tull of Wichita to provide an update from the National American Legion and discuss Gulf War syndrome. Fred Lucky, senior vice-president of the Kansas Hospital Association, from Topeka, was in to talk about Medicaid issues. Dr. Richard Nelson of Manhattan, head of K-State Engineering Extension, was in to talk about energy efficiencies, while Ed McKechnie, Gary Lundy and Kirk Hawley of Pittsburg were in representing Kansas short line railroads to discuss the issues facing railroad operators in Kansas.

The U.S. Attorney for Kansas, Eric Melgren, paid a courtesy visit to the office to discuss prosecution and law enforcement issues, while Joseph York of Emporia was in on behalf of the National Teachers Hall of Fame to update me on the induction ceremony preparations. Wayne Godsey of Kansas City, Richard Wartell of Manhattan, Mark Vail of Hays, Patti McCormick of Independence and Executive Director Harriet Lange of Topeka were in representing the Kansas Association of Broadcasters. They discussed the rise of digital television, satellite radio and indecency standards. Representing the Kansas Credit Unions were Garth Strand with the Hutchinson Credit Union and David Dick with the Kansas Credit Union Association. Walter Hill of Hays was in the office on behalf of the High Plains Medical Center to discuss general legislative issues facing the center.

Kansas Department of Transportation Secretary Deb Miller of Topeka was in to discuss the transportation bill and provide an update on Kansas' transportation projects. Gene Pflughoff of Ulysses, Luann Watson of Elkhart, De Ann Rickets of Sublette, Glenda Harvey of Ashland and Stanton Janssen, Bob Mosier and Stephanie of Otis were in representing Kansas Resource Conservation and Development to discuss program and budget issues. Sally Tesluk, Executive Director for the Community Health Center in Hutchinson, and Karla Finnell, Executive Director for the Kansas Association for the Medically Underserved in Topeka, were in to discuss the upcoming community health center application process. Woody Woodward, Administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration, and Sue Peterson from K-State were in the office to discuss funding for K-State Salina to make repairs to their airport hangars and other infrastructure needs.

Jessica Walters, a student at Lakin High School, and Katie Edwards, a student from Thomas More Prep in Hays, were in the office. Also in the office was Leadell Ediger of Salina, Executive Director for the Kansas Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agency to discuss early childhood and families in Kansas. Barney King, Commander of the Civil Air Patrol unit in Salina, was in the office to discuss defense issues and extending public safety officer benefits to the Civil Air Patrol. Britt Gates from the ZOIE Foundation in Anthony was in the office to discuss the transportation bill and child safety measures for vehicles.

Very truly yours,

Jerry